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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CE JAMIE LAMORE

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15

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. In their first substantial meeting in more than a year, Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany of Hungary and Prime Minister Robert Fico of Slovakia on November 15 discussed ways to decrease ethnic tensions that reached a flash point during a November 1 soccer match in the Slovakian border town of Dunajska Streda. Gyurcsany and Fico issued a joint statement following their meeting, committing to counter extremist ideologies and groups as well as searching for ways to strengthen cross-border, "good neighborly" relations. While this meeting is a small, positive step forward, much remains to be done to address fundamental minority issues, which, over the past two years, have been exacerbated by ultra-nationalist groups on both sides of the border - in particular the right-wing Jobbik party and Magyar Garda in Hungary, and Slovak National Party head Jan Slota in Slovakia. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) During the past year, Hungarian Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany and Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico have been standing in the wings - stage left and stage right - unable to find the right moment - or reason - to move to stage center for a substantive meeting. Only in the aftermath of violence at a soccer match in the Slovakian border town of Dunajska Streda (Dunaszerdahely in Hungarian) on November 1, where Slovak riot police injured more than 60 of the 800 Hungarian fans in attendance (ref B), did the two agree to meet November 15.

¶3. (SBU) Following the meeting, the Prime Ministers issued a four-point, joint statement committing to: reject extremist ideology and groups; strengthen a commitment to use all possible political and legal tools to counter extremists ideologies; protect the cultural identity of ethnic minorities living in both countries; and nurture the "good neighborly" relationships between the two countries in order to further strengthen cross-border economic and other cooperation.

¶4. (SBU) While the meeting is a small step forward to improve bi-lateral relations, the main Hungarian opposition party, Fidesz, took Gyurcsany to task after Saturday's meeting for being "incapable of protecting Hungarian citizens." The Fidesz Press Spokesman noted that the Prime Minister did not press Fico to provide a full report on the Slovak police actions - reported as excessive in the majority of the Hungarian press - during the November 1 soccer match. However, as a follow-up to Saturday's meeting, Gyurcsany sent a letter to Fico on Sunday, November 16, requesting that the Slovak Prime Minister charge an independent authority to investigate the incident.

¶5. (SBU) In response, during a Sunday Slovak television program as reported by Hungarian press, Fico indicated that

the Slovakian Chief Public Prosecutor is suitably well qualified to handle the issue. Continuing, Fico commented that Gyurcsany was in a much tougher position vis-a-vis extremism due to the economic and political situation in Hungary - one that lends itself to strengthening extremist views. That said, Slovak Government coalition partner and Slovak National Party leader Jan Slota's frequent statements slurring Hungarian politicians and national symbols (ref A) legitimizes the Slovakian Government's anti-Hungarian attitude in the minds of many Hungarians.

¶6. (SBU) There are, however, Hungarian politicians who are working to engage their Slovak partners on these bi-lateral issues. Our contacts in Parliament told us on November 17 that Speaker Katalin Szili plans to meet her opposite on December 3. Additionally, Matyas Eorsi, SZDSZ (Free Democrat) Chairman of Parliament's European Affairs Committee, told us on November 14 that during a meeting with his counterpart, he admitted that Hungary needs to deal with its own extremists, hoping this would encourage a "spirit of self-criticism" from his opposite number. That said, in a follow-up conversation on November 17, Eorsi commented that he did not expect anything major to come out of the Prime Ministers' meeting, noting that Fico needs to keep the radicals in his camp for the next elections.

¶7. (SBU) Comment. It is an interesting statement on the status of Hungarian/Slovakian bi-lateral relations that a violent soccer match provided the impetus for the two Prime Ministers to meet after a year of on-again, off-again planned meetings. While both Gyurcsany and Fico committed to counter extremism, they failed to address the many root causes on both sides of the border, which include: irredentist goals of

the Hungarian far-right; establishment of the Forum of Hungarian parliamentarians as a perceived pretext to interfere in internal Slovakian politics; restrictions on use of Hungarian language in Slovakian textbooks; perceived limited financial support to Slovakian schools with ethnic Hungarian majorities; Slovak reaffirmation of "collective guilt" legislation; and perhaps most significantly, Prime Minister Fico's apparent unwillingness to distance himself from Slota's numerous highly disrespectful and demeaning comments about Hungarians. We will watch with interest the results of his promise on November 16 to "attempt to convince" Slota to stop insulting Hungarian people and their politicians, as well as Gyurcsany's guidance to Justice and Law Enforcement Minister Draskovics to develop proposals to counter radical, extremist movements that damage the reputation of Hungary and serve as a catalyst for anti-Hungarian behavior in the region. End comment.

¶8. (SBU) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Bratislava.  
Foley